

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARY

51

A SERMON.

BY THE
VENERABLE EDWARD WIX, M/A.
Archdeacon of Newfoundland.

St. John's:
PRINTED BY J. RYAN, KING'S PRINTER.
—
1831.

F 8252



DEDICATION.

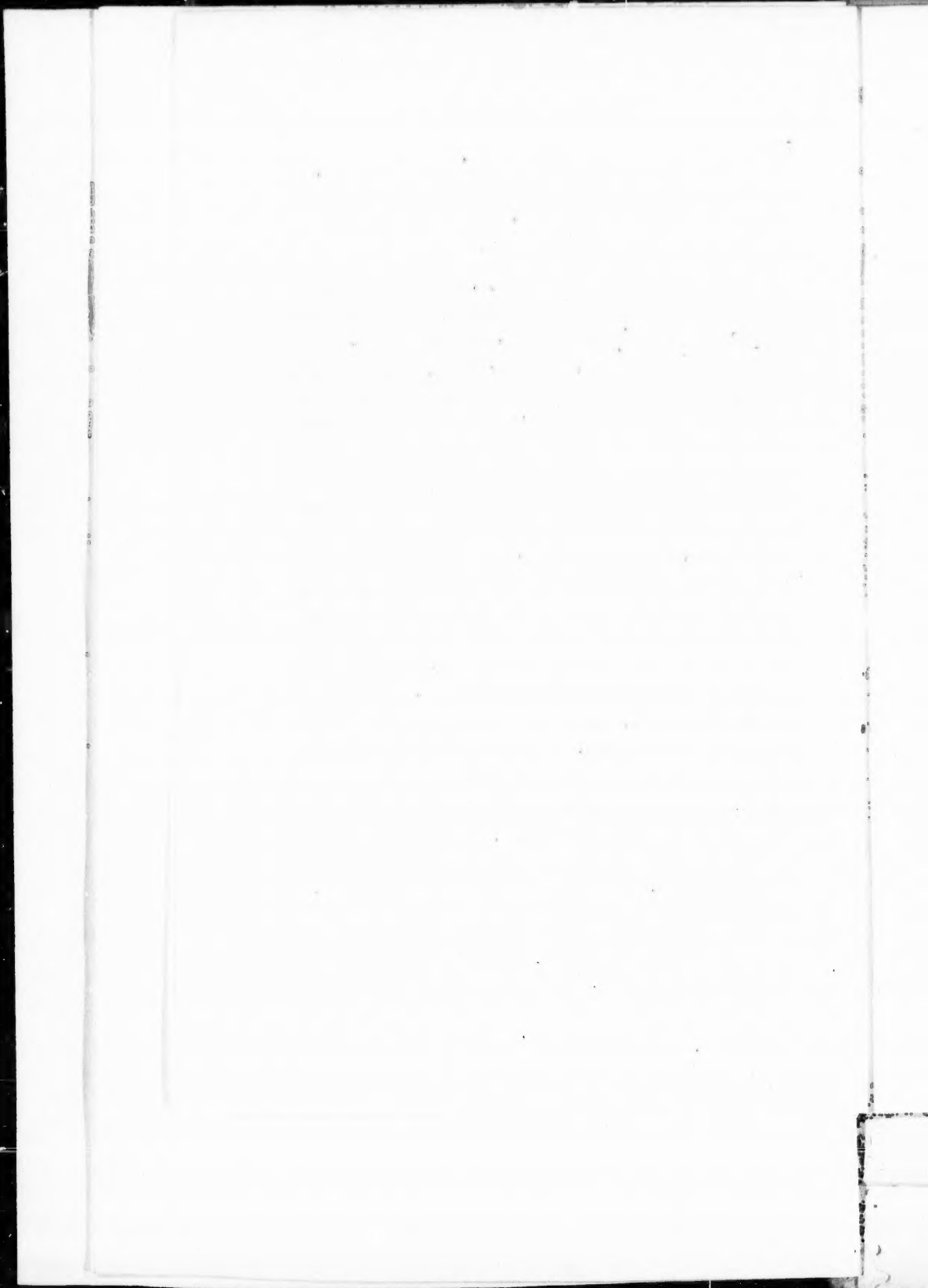
TO those Ladies who are joint Patronesses, with my dear wife, in the Sale for the benefit of the St. John's Church Sunday Schools, the profits of this printed Sermon are presented, for the furtherance of their excellent objects.

Among those to whom the Sermon is affectionately Dedicated they must allow me, however, to include, with themselves, our young friends, as well male as female,—to whom I, in common with our worthy Rector, and the rest of the Congregation of St. John's, am so much indebted for the fidelity and zeal with which they conduct the Parochial Sunday Schools. To persons who give such unequivocal proof of the estimation in which they hold the claims of Sunday Schools upon the members of the Church, the sentiments of this Sermon, which must be in complete accordance with their own, will be it's best recommendation. The discourse has, I am aware, no other merits than those of sincerity, of soundness, and of soberness: But if this partial publication of it shall give to the sacred cause in which we are embarked a present stimulus and a lasting interest, I shall be more fully gratified, by the result of my present selection, than I could have been by a preference of other manuscripts, which might have given greater evidence of professional industry or ability.

May God bless you in time and in eternity!—*you*, your dear young charge, and all around you.

E. W.

ARCHDEACONRY,
St. John's, Newfoundland, }
August 27, 1831.



SERMON.

And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water is naught, and the ground barren.

And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him.

And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land.

So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.

II. KINGS, ch. 2, v. 19—22, inclusive.

THE continual miracles which were wrought by Elisha were testimonies from Heaven of his divine mission. The divided waters of Jordan, and the healed spring at Jericho, were evidences to himself that what he had entreated of his late Master would be granted to him

and that a double portion of Elijah's spirit rested upon him; and they proved to the sons of the Prophets in general that, though their late spiritual father had been removed from them, they still had a Prophet among them.

The men of Jericho came, we are informed, to Elisha, to make a request which shewed their belief that he was truly sent by God.—The stream which watered their town was unwholesome: "and the men of the city said "unto Elisha,—Behold! I pray thee the situation of this city is pleasant, as my Lord "seeth."

The situation of their city must have been pleasant indeed. It had tempted Hiel, the Bethelite, in defiance of the well-known curse of Joshua, (VI. 26,) to rebuild the city, laying the foundation of it, as had been threatened, in the death of his first-born, gradually losing his children, one after another, as he proceeded in his impious work, and finishing it, or setting up the gates of it, in the death of his youngest.† Moses, of old, had alluded to its beauty, and had called it the city of the palm trees.*—But pleasant as its situation was, and great as its former advantages of soil must have been,

† I. Kings, xvi. 34.

* Deut. xxxiv. 3.

which could induce people to dwell on a spot so accursed, and so near to the noisome lake of Sodom, yet the sins of its inhabitants caused a curse to cleave to it. The Lord, who turneth "rivers into a wilderness, and the waters "springs into dry ground, and a fruitful land "into barrenness, for the wickedness of "them that dwell therein," ‡ made the waters of this delightful spot unwholesome, and its soil unfruitful. "The situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth, but the water is naught and the ground barren."

When Elisha heard this, he seems to have resolved to give proof of the power of his God, who could by instruments the most simple. He pursued the same course in this instance which he pursued, afterwards, in the case of Naaman the leper, §—the same which our blessed Lord still pursues in His own sacramental means of grace. That the excellency of the power might appear to be God's, and not the effect of man's skill, he recommended a seemingly inadequate remedy. By this course he tried the faith of the people. He said, "Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein." They did not ask cavilling and cap-

‡ Ps. ciii. 33. 34. § II. Kings, v. 10.

tious questions upon this. - They did not say, "Why a *cruse*?" "Why a *new* one?" "Why *salt* in it?" "Can a greater quantity of salt lessen the brackish flavor of streams which are too salt already?" or "what can a small cruse of it avail, though its virtue should be equal to that of our own balsam tree?"

Like the faithful parent who, beneath the Christian dispensation, does not stop to ask "what virtue can there be in the water of sprinkling?" "How can the prayer of a Priest be blessed to my child's regeneration?" but brings his child in Baptism to CHRIST, that it may be "born again of water and of the Spirit;"—Like the young believer who, when invited to the apostolic solemnity of Confirmation, does not say "What can the blessing of a fellow-man avail me?" but, "LORD, what wilt Thou have me to do?"—Like the humble Christian who, when reminded of the efficacy and grace which may attend the ministrations of a divinely-commissioned priesthood, does not reply, with Korah, "All the congregation are holy," but listens with meek heart and due reverence to those who are set over him by the Lord;—Like the faithful penitent who, when invited to the LORD's Table, does not say "What

can bread and wine avail to the support of a soul burdened with sin?" but comes and does, as the Lord commanded, in remembrance of Himself:—so these believers at Jericho, when the Lord's Prophet said "Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein," brought it to him without any hesitation or doubting.

Then Elisha went forth with the salt-cruse in his hand;—But he did not look to the broad and foaming Jordan, which was near: he did not seek the nearer rapids, which made up the aggregate of the waters of Jericho: but he traced the streamlet at the back of their city through its mazy windings, through groves of palm, and swamps, and barrens, till at some distance, it may be, on the wilderness of Bethaven, he discovered a gushing fount, the spring of the waters which brought disease to the town's inhabitants and barrenness to their soil. "He went forth unto the *spring* of the waters, and cast the salt in *there*."

To this circumstance I would fix the attention of my readers; and may the Holy Spirit bless the meditations which a consideration of it may suggest to us.

In vain might the Prophet have purged the waters of their town with a continual miracle, if

he had left the fountain-head untouched.— They would have needed a *continual* cleansing, and the wan crowd might, from time to time, have waited the season of his coming with as much anxiety as that with which the diseased throng watched for the presiding angel in the cloisters of Bethesda.*

But the heaven-directed Prophet “went forth unto the spring and cast the salt in there.”

I. Now are we not, in this conduct of Elisha, reminded of the method which every spiritual physician should adopt in his endeavours to eradicate the various symptoms of moral evil which deform the world? Does it not bring to our recollection the advice of the wisest of men, “Keep *thy heart* with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life!” § Nay, are we not reminded of the precepts of CHRIST,—† “Those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man: for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies; these are the things which defile a man:”—and again, || in another place, “Either make the tree good and

* John v. 2—4.

§ Prov. iv. 23.

† Matt. xv. 18—20.

|| Matt. xii. 32—34.

his fruit good, or, else, make the tree corrupt and his fruit corrupt, for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers! How *can* ye, being evil, speak good things, for *out of the abundance of the heart* the mouth speaketh.—

A good man, out of the good treasure of *the heart*, bringeth forth good things, and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things." Are we not reminded of the case of the Jews whose *heart* is, to this day, veiled when Moses is read, and of the Gospel which is now hid or veiled, to them that are lost; ‡ who hug their delusions and are uncircumcised in *heart* and ears, and so deserve to perish?

Let us begin the reformation of ourselves and of the world around us, at the very spring and well-head of the evil. It will be in vain to endeavour to turn back the tide of evil passions in their deep and turbid channel. Their course cannot be staid by such a method. Those who strive against the stream, or expect the cure to work up backwards to the secret spring, will lose their labor. The fountain must be purged. "Our heart," as Bishop Hall observes, "Our heart is a well of bitter and venomous water; "our actions are the streams. In vain shall we

‡ II. Cor. iv. 3.

"cleanse our hands while our hearts are evil." All washing which does not cleanse the dark chambers of pollution which are within the heart will be but as the washing of Pilate, which did not cleanse him from his iniquity,—or as the painting of a Sepulchre, which leaves it still all loathsome within. All moral reformation which is built upon any other foundation than that which is laid in the new creature in **CHRIST JESUS**, will be but as an house built upon the sand, or as the unskilful daubing of untempered mortar. Let us, therefore, pray for the grace of God's quickening spirit, that our hearts may be renewed and a right spirit created within us, that our hearts may be seasoned with salt, that our thoughts may be purged, and that our actions, in consequence, may glorify our **God** and **Savior** in all things. Let us not flatter others, or content ourselves, with the hope of an imperfect reformation, lest it be said of us, as of **Judah**, that "she turned not unto the **LORD** with her whole heart, but feignedly." Let us teach others, and learn ourselves, to love the **LORD** with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind. If we keep this first and great commandment we shall find all other duties easy and natural. They flow from this as

unconstrainedly as rivers flow from the parent-spring:—"He that loveth God keepeth His commandments." * He whose treasure is in heaven has his heart there also. † His conversation will be *of* Heaven, and *in* Heaven. He will steadfastly look up thither: In heart and mind he will be continually ascending thither; and *there* he will continually dwell with his ascended Savior, till he sees those heavens opened, and the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

II. Another very profitable reflection may be drawn from the conduct of the prophet.

Were application made to him to heal the unwholesomeness of the waters of which so many in a crowded town complained,—would he be regardless of the broad expanse, which, like this before us, wafts the commerce of other climes to our very doors, but, going to the back of your town, would he trace some rivulet, along it's marshy current, to it's source amid the woods, and finding the spring, would he cast the salt in there?

My friends and neighbors! what would be his course if we were to tell him that the Lord's day is very often profaned among us? that our

* John xiv. 15.

† Luke xii. 34. |

churches are deserted, our sacraments neglected, —that our streets are frequently the scenes of drunkenness, and that sounds of revelry disturb the stillness of our Sunday evenings? What if we were to tell him that there were several in the present generation who do not regard the chastity of their persons, or the souls of their dependents, or the truth of their words, or the integrity of their dealings?—Why,—he would command us to train up the rising generation in the way wherein they should go, that, so, when they became old, they might not depart from it; || that before the great and dreadful day of the Lord, the hearts of the fathers might be turned to the children, § and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest the Lord come and smite the place with a curse. So would he go forth unto the spring, and cast the salt in there.

The interest which the Prophet took in the colleges of the sons of the Prophets, which were at Jericho and at Bethel, should inform us this. Let not this example be lost upon us. The profligacy of the present race, and their carelessness in sacred things, is so notorious, that, alas! all observation upon these subjects has become common-place. It would

|| Prov. xxii. 6.

§ Luke i. 17.

is neglected,
 ne scenes of
 relry disturb
 s? What
 re several in
 regard the
 uls of their
 ords, or the
 —he would
 eneration in
 at, so, when
 depart from
 al day of the
 at be turned
 he children
 e and smite
 he go forth
 there.
 took in the
 ets, which
 ould inform
 lost upon
 t race, and
 is so noto-
 upon these
 It would
 17.

be almost vain for the Preacher to pronounce, from the House of God, warnings against sinners who never enter that sacred threshold. He may steadily pursue his course, with the hope that the Word of God may, through his means, be applied to the hearts of some formal worshippers; but with the melancholy certainty that, to the ears and hearts of the greater number who stand in need of his exhortations, and who never meet him there, they never can gain access.

One great excellency of the House of Prayer consists, however, in this, that, in united supplication, we may there intreat the Lord to turn the hardened from the error of their ways, that they may be converted and live. Who knows but that, in answer to our prayers, the Lord may, on Sunday next, turn and shed a blessing upon profligate or drunkard, who may be mispending those very moments which we shall be there striving in the Spirit to hallow and to sanctify? I dare to say that I shall be alluding to feelings which many, who read this, will understand, when I say that, to the widowed mother, the unrequited father, and the deserted wife, who are not attended in that House of God by all who should be with them,

those prayers and those hopes are full of consolation. They have found, amid their wounded spirit's sufferings, that it has been good for them to be there. O! ye, who, as ye walk to Zion, have no arm of earthly relation to lean upon! may the petitions which you there make for your thoughtless offspring, your backsliding partners, your careless domestics, and your jeering neighbors, be received! May God in His mercy listen to the intercessions of His faithful people in behalf of those who do not pray for themselves!

But you to whose charge innocent infants are committed, who, having been introduced into the Christian fold, are precious babes in Christ, you are yet strangers, (and strangers may you ever, ever, be!) to the tormenting apprehensions and the harassing pangs which *they* must experience whose children are undutiful, "without natural affection," neglecters of God, and followers of the paths which lead to ruin here and condemnation hereafter!

Would you rejoice in your children's increase in every Christian grace? Would you joy in beholding them living together, like brethren, and consenting to each other in mutual offices of love? Would you have them become an

full of con-
 sider wounded
 a good for
 ye walk to
 on to lean
 here make
 backsliding
 and your
 ay God in
 ons of His
 who do not

ent infants
 introduced
 s babes in
 strangers
 ormenting
 gs which
 are undu-
 neglecters
 which lead
 after!
 s increase
 ou joy in
 brethren,
 al offices
 ecome an

ornament to their christian profession, and an honor to yourselves? and able, hereafter, to speak when your spiritual enemies are at the gate. Then bind the tender branches in the way in which you would delight to see them grow: What nature and religion more decidedly require of you in the case of your natural offspring, and of those for whose religious education you became sureties at their baptism,—*that* kindness extend, also, to your poorer neighbor's,—aye, and to every neighbor's, child! Mould the infant mind to holiness and purity before sin can shed its blight upon it. Yes! Parents and Teachers! Pour to Heaven your fervent entreaties that your pious labours may be blessed—that “the old Adam in these children may be so buried that the new man may be raised up in them;” “that all carnal affections may die in them, and that all things belonging to the Spirit may live and grow in them;” “that they may have power and strength to have victory, and to triumph against the devil, the world, and the flesh;” “that whosoever is dedicated to God by our office and ministry, may, also, be endued with heavenly virtues, and everlastingly rewarded.” Do you ask how soon religious instruction may

be commenced? Let the same sacramental office of your Church, which supplies you such forms of supplication, instruct you that infants "be taught so soon as they shall be able to learn" what a solemn vow, promise, and profession, was made for them at their Baptism. Do you ask, again, "How soon they may be able to learn?" Let the Prophet reply: * "Whom shall we teach knowledge? and whom shall we make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts: for precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little." As soon as their artless tongues can lisp the name of "Our father who is in Heaven," lead them to inquire, in the language of Job, † "Where is God, my maker; who teacheth us more than the beasts of the field, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of Heaven?" If you value, yourselves, the benefits of Redemption, and of the knowledge of God's word, and of the institutions of your Apostolic Church, "Teach them your children, speaking of them when you sit upon your house and when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise

* Isaiah xxviii. 9, 10. † Job xxxv. 11.

up."‡ Above all, address yourselves to their imitative instinct, and teach them by your own example. You will thus stay the progress of corruption in the rising race. You will have gone "forth unto the spring, and cast the salt in *there*."

You may gather confidence in such a course from the success of our Prophet at Jericho.— "When he had so done, he said, Thus saith the LORD." After a faithful use of the revealed means, he gave, (as you must give) all the glory of the wonderful work to GOD: "*Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land.*"

The compiler of these sacred records, from which the text is taken, is supposed to be Ezra, and to have collected them four hundred years after the event here noticed. He adds his own testimony to the miracle: "So the waters were healed *unto this day*, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake." To this we may add the testimony of a modern traveller. D'Arvieux has most diligently searched among the numerous brooks and gardens, which mark the site of ancient Jericho, for bitter water and for barren ground; but in vain.

‡ Deut. vi. 7.

Such blessing, with its gracious influence purging, healing, cleansing, we, too, may expect to come down upon the early instruction which we give our children and the little ones around us. As patriots, who know that "righteousness exalteth a nation," we are called thus to go "forth unto the spring." As parents, who need not to be informed that "a foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her that bare him," we are called to "cast the salt in there." As reasoning beings, who are asked by one inspired apostle "what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" and are informed by another that "the promise is to us and to our children," we are engaged not to spare the salt: As followers of Christ, we are bound to feed *His lambs*.

But, in this evil generation, in which false philosophy, on the one side, would recommend schemes of education in which Religion has no part,—and a sceptic liberality, on the other, would urge the adoption of some spurious creed divested of all the essentials of that religion which alone deserves the name of Christianity,—we cannot be too cautious that the salt which we "cast into the spring," and the "salt" which we *have in ourselves*, be the salt of the

sanctuary, pure and without alloy. "Salt is good; but if the salt have lost his savor, it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men." §

For the purity of the education with which her rising generation shall be salted, the church has made every provision;—and the priests of the church are the surest guarantees. We look with the most lively interest to the infants of our flock, and we would wish so to speak from the pulpit that they might hear and understand each word we say upon each returning Sunday. Next to the fond parents whom they have in the flesh, *who* may be conceived to take a deeper interest in their welfare, than we in whose arms they were dedicated to the Lord who bought them?—than we, their spiritual fathers, who have begotten them *again* in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel?

I declare that, when I look around upon a Christian congregation of various ranks and ages, the respect which I feel for the hoary head which is in the way of wisdom—the reverence in which I hold the poor who retain their integrity amid temptation—and the bonds of Christian communion in which I feel myself

§ Matt. v. 13.

knit to all, who, overlooking the imperfection of the Minister, shew themselves humbly disposed to respect his authority and to receive his exhortations;—all these feelings, warm as they are, and pregnant with the dearest interests to my soul, must yield to the affectionate anxiety with which I view, at one time, these young creatures lapped upon their parent's knee, or, at another, directing inquiring eyes towards their teacher, from every part of the circle in which they are arranged to hear of CHRIST and of His love, of holiness, and heaven, and eternity! When I think of the intricate conflicts of interest and ambition and passion, in which their *older* brethren are immersed in their pilgrimage,—of the erroneous views which the many entertain of the nature of CHRIST's kingdom, and of the dispositions which are to make them fit for it,—I behold my Savior taking some one of these little ones, and setting him in the midst of us, and swearing, by Himself, * “Except ye be converted, and become” (not perfect, indeed—for *perfect* here we cannot be) “Except ye be converted, and become” (not perfect, indeed, but *promising*) “as this little child, ye shall not enter

* Matt. XVIII. 3.

therein;" and I hear the awful declaration from the same lip of truth—"Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."†

Do you deem that the counsel of the Church and the efforts of churchmen, as regards the early initiation of children into the mysteries of evangelical truth, are directed to a visionary object?—Let the pious author of "The Christian Year"‡ plead for my young charge:

O! say not—dream not,—heavenly notes

To childish ears are vain,

That the young mind at random floats,

And cannot reach the strain.

* * * * *

Was not our LORD a little child,

Taught, by degrees, to pray—

By father dear and mother mild

Instructed, day by day?

And loved HE not of Heaven to talk,

With children in his sight;

To meet them in HIS daily walk,

And to HIS arms invite. §

Do not be unbelieving in your labor of love:
In due season you will certainly reap, if you do

† Matt. XVIII. 6. ‡ Rev. J. Keble, Oriel Coll., Oxford.

§ Article—"Catechism."

not faint. To engage their love—to be the honored instrument of giving a moral direction to their thoughts, and of training their young ideas to truth and evangelical holiness,—I would forego the fame which might reward the eloquence of a Paul, or an Apollos. I would gladly rest my title to a seat among the saints in Heaven, on my turning their young hearts to righteousness, on my going forth to the spring and casting my salt in there.

I would make it known to every parent of our communion, that the Sunday School is open to his child; and I would urge on every one, who has the guardianship of the orphan, the propriety of his applying to himself the question of David—"Is there yet any of the house of my friend, that I may show the kindness of God unto him." || Those, too, who have been sponsors to any at the sacrament of their Baptism, have an opportunity afforded them, by our Sunday Schools, of redeeming their pledge, and of shewing "the kindness of God" for the children of their adoption. They may provide for their youthful charge being taught, at the priest's lips, all such things as "christians ought to know and believe to their soul's health."

|| II. Sam. ix. 3.

On the passage of Jeremiah (xxx. 34.)—"They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the Lord," some have conjectured that the *order* is there signified in which the knowledge of the glory of God, which is to cover the earth, is to be communicated; and that the sacred leaven is to spread, from the lower classes of society, upwards, to the higher. We need not hazard, however, any so speculative a theory: But we may be convinced that the foundation of any general reformation must be laid in the improvement of all ranks of the rising generation; that out of the lips of stammerers God has ordained praise; and that the hearts of parents may thus be savingly turned to their children.

It is our truest wisdom, as it is our clearest duty, then, to go forth unto the spring and to cast the salt in there. It may so be allowed to us to exult with holy confidence, while we ascribe unto the LORD the praise,—“Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters.” So the waters *from this day* shall be healed, according to the saying of the LORD which He hath spoken:—There shall not be, *any more*, death, or dearth, or barren land, or unfruitful tree, in the garden of the LORD. Even so, LORD, let it be! Amen! Amen!